

MINUTES

Somerville Redevelopment Authority

Wednesday, September 16, 2020 at 5:30 p.m.

(Virtual Meeting)

Software: GotoWebinar

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. C. 30A, s. 18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, as well as Mayor Curtatone's Declaration of Emergency, dated March 15, 2020, this meeting of the Somerville Redevelopment Authority was conducted via remote participation.

Present from the Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA): Phil Ercolini (Chair), William Gage, Iwona Bonney, Patrick McCormick, Ben Ewen-Campen and Emily Hedeman. Also present were Eileen McGettigan as Special Counsel, Tom Galligani as Director of Economic Development, George Proakis as Executive Director of OSPCD, Lauren Drago as Urban Revitalization Planner and Sunayana Thomas, Senior Economic Development Planner.

Phil Ercolini, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:31 PM. Open session commenced. A quorum was present. This meeting was audio recorded.

Documents and Other Exhibits Used at the Meeting

- i. Draft August 19, 2020 Special Meeting Minutes
- ii. Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan and PowerPoint Presentation
- iii. Public Comment Letters received on the Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan

Discussion and Actions Taken

1. Approval of Minutes:

- August 19, 2020 Minutes – Item #2 - replace “vacant Walgreens” to “vacant Star Market”.

Motion to Approve the August 19, 2020 Minutes as corrected by Iwona Bonney, seconded by Bill Gage.

Roll Call Vote:

Iwona Bonney, Yes

Ben Ewen- Campen, Yes

Bill Gage, Yes

Emily Hedeman, Yes

Patrick McCormick, Yes

Phil Ercolini, Yes

2. Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan & Revised Draft

Mr. George Proakis, Executive Director of OSPCD, presented to the board and requested the board to take a vote to approve the Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan.

Mr. Proakis provided an overview of the history of Winter Hill and the needs of the community today. He explained that the goal for the City and the community was to bring back the vibrancy that once existed in Winter Hill and to provide opportunities for more open space, affordable housing and other amenities. He highlighted that there was some success with the 45-unit housing development on Temple and Broadway; however, no new development has since been proposed. There have been many challenges in the past to develop the blighted and decadent sites proposed in the plan but all have been unsuccessful. Developers have either presented proposals that did not meet the needs of the community or comply with zoning or were unable to assemble the sites.

Since then, the City has completed a neighborhood plan and refined the zoning as part of the city wide zoning overhaul. The objective of the plan was to shape the Winter Hill identity as a neighborhood-oriented Main Street by creating green and open gathering spaces and a pedestrian and bike friendly environment. The plan calls for additional affordable housing to minimize displacement and to pursue redevelopment that produces equitable outcomes for vacant and underutilized properties. The urban renewal plan is a set of steps that ensures the community has the opportunity to meet their needs and achieve the goals in the Neighborhood Plan.

Mr. Proakis continued by explaining the approval process for the urban renewal plan. If the Somerville Redevelopment Authority approves the plan, it goes to the Planning Board for a vote and then the City Council for a public hearing and final vote. Once that is complete, it will be sent to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for approval which gives the SRA the right to exercise its authority to implement the urban renewal plan. He emphasized that it has been a long and challenging 10 years to reach this point and he hopes it will take less time to achieve the goals of the neighborhood.

Comments from the Board: No Comments

Public Comments:

Comment: When did the committee start working on this plan? Were any plans drafted that did not include the occupied buildings on the corner of Temple Street? For what reasons are the occupied properties being included in the plan? Why weren't the property

owners and businesses notified about the plans to take their buildings and close their businesses? Have any developers spoken to this committee, if so, who are they and when? Has the committee considered any other uses for this building site, perhaps a Youth Center or park?

- The Board asked for clarification for what committee the attendee was referring to. The attendee clarified that he was referring to the SRA. The SRA clarified that they have not spoken to a developer regarding Winter Hill.
- City staff directed the public commenter to the urban renewal plan, which addresses the questions raised, for the outlines of the community process and outreach in Winter Hill.

Comment – Why is the dentist office at the corner not included?

Comment – Is the affordable housing requirement limited to the Sewall lots only? Does the plan put forward specifics about the percentage of affordable housing?

- Mr. Proakis explained that one of the challenges the site has had in the past is to be consistent with zoning. There is a minimum 20% inclusionary housing requirement in the new zoning code. If the community decides there is a need for more, it could be incorporated in the RFP process. It'll most likely be a mixed rate housing project but at a minimum 20% would be required.

Comment: Encourage a higher goal for inclusionary housing on the site. The plan is great and comprehensive. When is the right time for the community to push for more affordable housing?

- After the urban renewal plan is approved, a community committee will be established to refine the goals for this site and the process for development. That is the opportunity to have this discussion and craft a plan that is feasible. If the selected developer is unable to acquire the sites on their own and the SRA uses the eminent domain tool, we have to understand that having additional affordable housing could result in additional state or city funding to make the project work. That discussion is still to be had and for the committee and community to deliberate.

Comment: Why are the corner properties important for this development?

- Mr. Proakis explained that the lots are included because they are necessary to achieve the goals of the plan. From an urban design standpoint, the site layout and the opportunities to develop the site work when you have the corner parcels. The steps outlined in the urban renewal plan will make things whole for landlords and tenants that own property and provide them with additional opportunities for negotiations when the parcels are acquired.

Prior to leaving the meeting, Board member Ben Ewen-Campen shared his support for the Winter Hill urban renewal plan. He emphasized that both urban renewal and eminent

domain is not to be taken lightly; however, the community has been desperate to do something on these sites over the last decade, and the Star Market is a clear definition of blight. The private market has failed to make progress, and the process outlined in the plan will advance the development on the site to meet the community's goals. He stated that if he were in attendance for the vote, he would vote yes to approve the plan.

Board member Patrick McCormick thanked the community for the input received to date with concerns and support. He asked staff if there is data to show how people are using various modes of transportation and if the community has reduced its usage of automobiles.

- Mr. Proakis explained that car ownership decreases in buildings where less parking opportunities are offered. If you build a building with less parking, many assume that it will add to street parking, but it causes people with fewer cars to live there. It pushes the numbers down by making behavioral changes. The new zoning reduces parking requirements and requires a site like this to have no surface parking. If there is parking, it would be underground to accommodate more open space. The development would also be required to go through a transportation management demand process to establish every strategy necessary to reduce the urge to own a car by adding zip cars and biking spaces.

Comment: Attorney Phil Privitera, owner of 9 Temple, agreed that the Star Market and Walgreen sites are blighted and something must be done. However, the idea that a developer needs to take the corner site is not justified to take a fully functional, renovated and tenanted property. Urban renewal is meant to revitalize substandard, decadent and blighted areas. The buildings at 3 and 9 Temple Street are not blighted or open areas. Mr. Privitera continued to illustrate the renovations made to the building and the diversity of his tenants in the building. He also emphasized the need for a local developer instead of an out of state developer.

Public Comment: Rene Mardones, lead organizer with Somerville Community Corporation and member of Union United shared his experience with the Union Square Master Development process and the achievements made through a community benefit agreement. He encouraged the city to evaluate early the benefits the community wants to see in Winter Hill.

Motion to Approve the Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan by Patrick McCormick, seconded by Iwona Bonney.

Roll Call Vote:

Iwona Bonney, Yes

Ben Ewen- Campen, Absent

Bill Gage, Yes

Emily Hedeman, Yes

Patrick McCormick, Yes

Phil Ercolini, Yes

3. Union Square Update

Ms. Thomas provided the Union Square update.

No project updates at this time. US2 is working towards the closing documents for the SRA in October.

Vote: To Ratify Execution of Eversource Application for Natural Gas

Motion to approve by Bill Gage, seconded by Patrick McCormick.

Roll Call Vote:

Iwona Bonney, Yes

Ben Ewen- Campen, Absent

Bill Gage, Yes

Emily Hedeman, Yes

Patrick McCormick, Yes

Phil Ercolini, Yes

4. Public Comment Period

- Erika Tarlin – Bradford Ave – With the urban renewal process taking 7-10 years, what is the process if a developer comes forward with a viable plan? With the new zoning on MR5 on Broadway, would there be a coordination for additional housing?
 - Mr. Proakis explained that if there was a developer that is willing to execute the community plan then the SRA could accept them as the developer for the site. Regarding the MR5 question, it can be refined with the community to determine the focus on housing or commercial.
- Public Comment - The written comments that were provided, they would like that they be read aloud during the meeting. What does the SRA do with the written comments?
 - The SRA will post the comments on the website along with the other meeting materials that were sent to Board members.

Mr. Galligani, Director of Economic Development, announced that if any members of the public are interested in being a member of the community committee for Winter Hill, please contact Lauren Drago at ldrago@somervillema.gov.

5. Other Business Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair - None

6. Adjournment

Next Meeting Date – October, 21 2020 – 5:30pm - Virtual Meeting

Motion to adjourn by Bill Gage, seconded by Iwona Bonney at 6:26pm.

Roll Call Vote:

Iwona Bonney, Yes

Ben Ewen-Campen, Absent

Bill Gage, Yes

Emily Hedeman, Yes

Patrick McCormick, Yes

Phil Ercolini, Yes